

The Life and Culture of the Tribal Women in Kanyakumari District

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Abstract

Although the tribe, caste, sect, racial group and class are the various types of social groups found in India, it is the tribe and the caste which dominated the former among the primitive communities and the latter in Hindu Society. Much confusion has arisen in the past due to the indiscriminate use of these two words, they have been used by synonyms and therefore many tribes have been described as castes while a number of castes have received tribal designation. The life of the tribal people of Kanyakumari District is unique. They follow different customs and ceremonies that are suitable to their environment. The status of women is strange. They are a strong and well-built race fitted for the wilds they inhabit and their active habits. Their value systems, spirituality, capabilities and cultures have a huge untapped potential for sustainable development. They play a crucial role in the stewardship of natural resources and biodiversity and provide environmental services at local, regional and international levels. Indigenous people have rich, varied and locally rooted knowledge systems and their immense culture diversity is extremely valuable in a world threatened by the homogenizing trend of globalization. They have developed a remarkable power of scenting the different kinds of wild animals at a great distance and can elude them successfully in the thickest forest. Broadly speaking the tribal communities when compared with castes are far too underdeveloped and backward in economical, educational and cultural matters, but however they are not subjected castes. The tribes have a fierce desire to be self sufficient in the social and cultural life.

Keywords: primitive communities, indigenous people, tribal women, culture, society.

Introduction

Although the tribe caste, sect, racial group and class are the various types of social groups found in India, it is the tribe and the caste which dominated the former among the primitive communities and the latter in Hindu Society.

The Tribal's are ours original ancestors." chased is the hills and forest by the intrudes and invaders". They are mostly exploited by the people of the plains. The English term 'Tribe' is derived from the Latin word 'tribus' designating a particular kind of social and political organization existing in all these societies.

Origin of the Term Scheduled Tribes

The term "Scheduled Tribes" is of recent origin and came into existence by the Constitution of India adopted on 26 January, 1950. Prior to that they were called by various names such as "Aboriginals", "Adiwasis", "Forest Tribes", "Hill Tribes", and "Primitive Tribes".

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Tribal Population of India

The tribes are the real swadeshi products of India. According to 2011 census, there are about 977.58 lakh of people belonging to the scheduled tribes and they constitute about 8.08% of the population of the country. Madhya Pradesh has the largest tribal population in India. It has more than 1.6 cores Scheduled Tribe population. In the south, about one percent of the population of Kerala and Tamil Nadu are tribal.

Tribal Population of Tamil Nadu

The total tribal population in Tamil Nadu is 5.20 lakhs representing 1.07% of the total population of the state. There are 36 Scheduled Tribes Groups live in Tamil Nadu (1) Adiyar, (2) Aranadan, (3) Eravallan, (4) Irular, (5) Kadar, (6) Kaniyan, (7) Kattunayakan, (8) KochuVelan, (9) Kondakapus, (10) Kondareddis, (11) Kudiya, Melakud, (12) Kurichchan, (13) Kurumbas, (14) Kuruman, (15) Maha Malasar, (16) Malai Arayan, (17) Malai Pandaram, (18) Malai Vedan, (19) Malayali, (20) Malayakandi, (21) Mannan, (22) Mudugar, Muduvan, (23) Muthuvan, (24) Pallayan, (25) Palliyan, (26) Palliyar, (27) Paniyan, (28) Sholaga, (29) Uraly, (30) Kammara, (31) Kota, (32) Toda excluding Kanyakumari District and Shenkattahtaluk of Tirunelveli District, (33) Kaniyan, Kanyan, (34) Koraga, (35) Malakkuravan, (36) Malasar. Malayali has the first largest Tribes in Tamil Nadu.

Tribal Population of the Kanyakumari District

There are six tribal communities found in the southern most Kanyakumari District. They are Kaniyan, Kanikkaran, Kattunayakan, Kuluvar, Malaivedan, Malaikuravan. Now days mostly live in settlements in the kanyakumari district. Kani tribes form the majority. The kani tribal population of the District is 7282 which comprises 3554 males and 3728 females. According to the 2011 census report of the government the tribal population in the district are as below.

Table 1: Tribal Population of Kanyakumari District

Sl. No	Name of Reserve Forest	Settlements	Number of Families	Total Population	Total area allotted in hectares
1.	Kilamalai	15	415	1812	475.15
2.	Veerapuli	31	466	2240	734.33
3.	Asambu & Veerapuli	2	46	176	40.57
	Total	48	927	4228	1250.05

Tribal Settlement

Tribal settlement, which they called Vadis consist of huts made up of bamboo and grass. One 'Manai' is a piece of land covering an area of 823 square meters. This land under control also came to be forest officer, panchayat presented, head of kanni person 'Muttukani' range officer issue free permit to the not more than to persons per tribal household situated in and around the reserved forest area. The Muttukani looks after all

the social affairs in the settlement. He perform as judge in all matters econnected with the settlements. He also acts as panchayat president. The Muttukani presides over all the meetings organised now and then in the village.

Life style of the tribal women

The life of the tribal people of Kanyakumari District is unique. They follow different customs and ceremonies which is suitable to their environment. The status of women too are strange. They are a strong and well-built race fitted for the wilds they inhabit and are active habits. Geography determines the life of the people. Social life of the people varies from place to place according to the condition of nature. The fertile areas are the citadel of various culture and civilization. The tribes in Kanyakumari District settle in remote areas developed a culture of their own by utilising the minimum facilities available.

Appearances

The tribes in comparison are different from one another. Mostly tribes are very attractive to look at with black body, circular head, curled hair and broad noses. The tribal women are generally dwarf and small in size. Tribal women are highly moral. They are straight forward, truthful and open-hearted. Men are good trackers and fond of sport, and in clearing forest paths they have hardly any equals and show respect to women.

Occupation

The chief occupation of kanis are honey collection, agricultural works, hunting, vickpractices, hunting and fishing.

Food

Food is essential for human life. Without food man can not live. The tribals use varieties of foods. They use vegeterian and non-vegeterian foods. Their eat pork, beef and rate also, but do not eat buffalo meat. Their staple food is rice and ragi. Both men and woman consume alcoholic drinks, such as sarayam, kallu and other cheap fermented liquors. The woman also smoke beedis and the chew tobacco and betel nuts.

Dress

The men wear dhoti and towel but now a day men wear as usual dress. The women wear a long cloth, called charm, around their waists and wear a loose blouse called raveeka. but now days women wear coloured saris and blouses and moderan dress. some women wearing ample ornaments so as to reach the knees from the waist all round.

Puberty Ceremony

For each and every function they follow different rites. Pubertal rites, prayama vadu, are performed when tribal girl attains menarche. The girl is seclusion in an erected hut constructed with green coconut leaves by her maternal uncle. Pollution is observed for sixteen days. During this period, she is given a diet consisting of rice flour, jiggery, eggs, leafy vegetables and fish, with gingerly oil. On the sixteen days they observed the *sadangu* (puberty ceremony), She is given a bath and received clothes, sweets and cosmetics from her maternal uncle. The Kattu Naickan, Kuluvan, MalaiVedan, and Malakkuravan this tribal puberty ceremony is every same method, But kaniyan did not celebrated puberty ceremony. kanikarar Tribal people celebrated different type of Puberty Ceremony.

Marriage

The tribes follow different kinds of marriage system. They are Monogamy, Polygamy, and adult and child marriage. Polygamy is rarely observed. Some times in certain families the first wife directs her husband to bring one more wife. The tribals Kattu Naickan,

Kuluvan and Malakkuravan marriage system are mostly same method. This tribals accepted love marriage. But kanikkaran follow different type of marriage system. The dowry system is common among the tribals.

Pregnancy

The tribals observe pre and post-delivery rituals and restrictions. During the fifth month of pregnancy, the wife's close relatives bring edibles, palagaram, to the pregnant women. During pongal is performed, by cooking of rice in seven pots placed on seven hearths. When the rice boils, the ceremony is called Vayaru pongal. First they mould an image of Ganapathi, and sitting it in a suitable lace, boli the rice.

Maternity Ceremony

When the woman delivers herself of her first child, her husband observes three days pollution, but none for subsequent confinements. On all such occasions, the maternal relations of the women have to observe five days pollution. On the 28th day, the maternal uncle of the child arrives to perform the simple ceremony of tying the waist thread called arrainging. The ceremony is known as irupathiettu karuppu noolu kttu.

Funeral Rites

Tribals were formerly buried, but are now, excepting young children, cremated in a portion of the grounds of the habitation, or in a spot adjacent there to. After death a mixture of ganja raw rice and coconut is put into the mouth of the corpse, the son and the nephews and it is buried at some distance from their abode, mantras being repeated over the body. On the third day. Three measures of rice are boiled and placed in a cup or on a plantain leaf inside the shed then all bathe again and return home. The ashes are collected on the fourth day, and deposited under water.

Worship

Generally, the Kani people worship the nature in and around them. As most of the Kanis are Hindus they worship Hindu gods, mainly Bhadrakali, Siva and Vishnu. Kali is the popular goddess. At first the Christian missionaries came to the tribal areas of Pechipparai and Perunchani. They convert few families to Christianity.

Special Reference of the Tribal Women

In practice the kani women is not treated equal with the men. The kani women have got low status in the society. They have the idea of strict sexual morality. The kani women are not allowed to become a member of any council and decision making body. They are not even permitted to take decision in the settlement. They are involved in household activities. The kani is more concerned about the purity of kani women in their settlement.

Medical Facilities provided the Tamil Nadu Government

Introducing a new scheme "Special Medical Sufficiency Scheme" For example the mobile medical team wised every Monday to the all tribal area. Especially very important with tribal women health. Tamil Nadu Government open to the mini health centers, a network of primary health centers, community health centers, health sub-centers and mobile health services over all village panchayat.

Service of the Government Organizations Scheme

The Government introduced many schemes for the welfare of the ST.

a) Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy Maternity Benefit Scheme

Government of Tamil Nadu is committed to the health and welfare of the women and children particularly the poor and vulnerable. To compensate the wage loss during

pregnancy and to get nutritional food to avoid low birth weight babies, Tamil Nadu has implemented Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy Maternity Benefit Scheme on 15 June 2006. (Muthulekshmi Reddy was a first woman in India, got the Degree on Medicine) It provides financial assistance to poor pregnant women. Under this scheme, in order to meet the financial and nutritional requirement of the pregnant women Rs. 6000 with below the poverty line has been provided in two installments.

b) Janani Suraksha Yojana

The Government of India launched the National Maternity Benefit Scheme (NMBS) on 15 August 1995, aiming to provide maternal care in the form of better diet to expectant Mothers. The pregnant women below poverty line and all the pregnant women of SC, ST communities are the beneficiaries under this scheme.

c) Varumun Kappom Thittam

The Government of Tamil Nadu launched the Varumun Kappom Thittam on 22 November 1999 for screening and early detection of diseases in the community by conducting free comprehensive health checkup and treatment.

d) Mobile Medical Units

An eye screening camp for the Kani indigenous people was held at the Thottamalai Tribal settlement, situated beyond the Pechiparai dam in the forest, jointly by Bejan Singh Eye hospital and District Blindness Control society of Kanyakumari, sponsored by the Tribal Foundation on Saturday.

e) House Scheme

Government Poramboke lands wherever available are acquired and assigned to Scheduled Tribes purposes as well as house sites. Government of Tamil Nadu has evolved a comprehensive scheme for housing. This scheme special reference to provide the houses for tribal women.

f) Periyar Ninaivu Samathuvapuram Scheme

It was decided to build 100 Samathuvapuram at a cost of Rs. 35 cores all over Tamil Nadu. Periyar Ninaivu samathuvapurams in 50 more places during 1999-2000. This scheme allocated for places in Kanyakumari District. Periyar Ninaivu Samathuvapuram in pechipparai opened in the year 2012, many tribal women got benefitted through this house.

Construction of Roads

The tribal people are settled in the inner part of the hilly areas. So they have no proper roadway to come out. They suffer a lot in times of illness to go to hospitals so far their betterment roads were constructed by NREGA [National Rural Employment Guarantee Act] of 2007-2008.

Power Supply

The tribal areas in kanyakumari district have no electricity. They are using lamp. In the hilly areas it is not possible to bring electric power so the government is taking steps to supply power to tribal areas through the solar system.

Education

Education is the most important element in the development of any community. Education has special significance for the weaker sections of the society which are facing a new situation in the development process to adjust themselves properly to the changing circumstances. The Scheduled Tribes have fallen victims to the exploitation of the middlemen, merchants and moneylenders on account of their illiteracy and ignorance.

The need for their educational development, therefore, assumes prime importance to save them from economic exploitation and to help them in their all-round development.

The Tribal Education in Independence period

The tribal's are not improvement the education. Those days the tribal women treated very poor condition. After independence the government of India took a number of steps to strengthen the education of tribes. A large number of schools opened in different places of Kanyakumari district many tribal girls got educated through these institutions.

Tribal Education

Tribal Residential Schools function in hilly areas at Pechiparai, Pathukani, Manalodai and Vazhayathuvayal in Kanyakumari District. The number of girls availing of educational facilities is very little when compared to girls from other communities. After puberty, generally education of girl's often ceases, and girls are given in marriage at the age of 15 or 16. A few decades ago, the Kanis maintained the culture of sending all their women into seclusion in dense jungles on the arrival of any stranger near their to encourage girl's education.

The Directorate of ADTW is running 213 Government Tribal Residential School and one non-tribal Residential School in 13 districts with a total strength of 13,950 for the benefit of tribal children. At first the kanis have only two schools at Pechipparai and pathukani. Now the government takes steps to improve the education of tribes in Kanyakumari District. Now there are eight tribal schools in Kanyakumari district among them 2 High Secondary school and 3 Middle School and 3 Primary School for the Kanyakumari District. Provided with free boarding and lodging, woolen blankets, text books, writing materials and uniforms. The tribal residential school at Pechipparai was built mainly to promote the educational condition of the Scheduled Tribes. The foundation stone for the building was laid by governor of madras, Shri. Bishna Ram Medhi on 29 July 1958. This school was opened by Shri. Kamaraj, the Chief Minister of Madras on 3 August 1960.

Midday Meals

The government sanctioned the excess expenditure incurred towards supply of midday meals in the government tribal schools at Kanyakumari district. During the three years from 1965-66 to 1967-68, midday meals in the government tribal residential school at Kanyakumari district were supplied.

Medical care

The Medical officers of the Government Hospitals and Primary Health Centres should pay visits to Adi-Dravidar and Tribal. The scheme is implemented by the Director of Medical and Rural Health Services and Director of Public Health and Preventive Medicine. In Kanyakumari District school health camps are conducted on all Thursdays by the Medical officers of PHCs in the Government and Aided schools coming under the jurisdiction of that PHC.

Girls Hostel

Girls hostel scheme was started in the third five year plan. Its main aim was to provide residential facilities to the tribal girls in pursuit of education. The tribal students in the hostel are provided with free mats, double set uniform and stitching fee, text books, note books, bathing oil, soap, surf, face powder and play things.

Solar Water Heating System

Government Tribal Students Hostel Pechipparai has the scholar water heating system. In Kanyakumari District, it is the only tribal hostel which have their water heating facility.

Scholarship

Scholarship system has been started in all the Tribal Residential Schools in India. In Kanyakumari District all the tribal schools are benefited by the scholarship. They are two kinds of scholarship. They are pre- metric scholarship and post-metric scholarship.

Pre- Metric Scholarship

This scheme provides scholarship of rupees twenty five per month in classes I to V, Rupees forty per month in classes VI to VIII and rupees 50 per month in classes IX to X in respect of day scholars.

Post-Metric Scholarship

This scheme was introduced to provide with financial assistance to students at Post-Matriculation stage in different schools and college. During 2001-2002, central assistance of Rs. 159.28 core was released.

Economic Condition of Tribal Women

The development in economy is largely depended on the climate, availability of natural resources, development of infrastructural facilities, entrepreneurial skill, and attitude towards investments and the availability of skilled labour. As these facilities are not available in hilly areas, the economy of the tribal's are very poor. They develop their economy by utilizing the available resources in the hilly areas. The habitations of the kanikkars are numerous in Kanyakumari district. Their primary occupation is agriculture. Most of them do not own any agricultural lands.

The kanis both men and women are expert in basket making. These baskets have great demand in the neighboring villages and markets. Certain interested men supplemented their income by selling of baskets, bamboo and honey, collected from the neighboring settlement. The government approves the proposals of the Director of Women's Welfare for the starting of a work centre for giving training in Basket Making at Vellambi in Kanyakumari District for the benefit of Scheduled Tribes women. Most of kanis are expert in honey collection. The honey collect from the forest has great demand in the plains. The collected honey is sold in the local markets. The people of the plain use to cheat them by giving them very low prize. Now they are supplying the honey directly of honey societies, in Marthandam and Kulesekaram. As these societies are giving high price when compared with government societies they prefer to sell it to private societies.

Working at Plantations

A numbers of kanis are working at pechipparai and Ambadi rupper plantation both men and women are working on this plantation. The women usually clear the wed around the rupper trees. The kanis are fully depended upon the forest. All the settlers have equal rights for collection of five wood, banana leaves and other house hold materials from the forest.

Political Development

Many Constitutional rights are granted to ST and through government schemes and programmes, the condition of tribal women is development in Kanyakumari District. The tribal women leaders took active part during the General Parliamentary an Assembly and panchayat Elections. The General Elections to the Tamil Nadu Assembly was held on 21 January 1989. The study area comes under Vilavancode constituency. All the leaders of

kanikaran, men and women during elections became political workers of their respective parties. They were associated with the party of DMK, AIADMK, Congress, BJP (Hindu Munnani). Women too worth during elections of their respective parties. Many tribal areas are not accessible to go by land, for that they used to travel by boats and cast their votes.

Provisions for women in the 73th constitutional amendment are

One third of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every panchayat shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in panchayats (Art 243-D(i)) One third of the total number of seats reserved for women under d(i) shall be reserved for women belonging to SCs and STs (Art.243.D(2)) Thus the tribal women became the political leader in the administration of the country through panchayat.

Conclusion

The government of Tamil Nadu is taking so many welfare measures to look after the well-being of the tribal people. Even though the government is coming forward are not yet to reach the people. The economy of tribal is limited and not self sufficient one. In the long run the life of the tribes will be in progress.

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